

Heroin Addiction Treatment as a Response to the Public Health Problem of Opiate Drug Dependence

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Introduction

Heroin addiction is a serious and complex health issue that affects individuals and communities worldwide. It is characterized by a compulsive and uncontrollable use of heroin, leading to numerous physical, psychological, and social problems. However, there is hope for individuals struggling with heroin addiction, as effective treatment options are available to help them recover and regain control of their lives [1].

The goal of heroin addiction treatment is not only to help individuals overcome their physical dependence on the drug but also to address the underlying factors contributing to addiction, such as psychological, social, and environmental factors. Treatment approaches for heroin addiction are often comprehensive and multifaceted, recognizing the need to address the whole person [2].

This introduction will provide an overview of some common treatment modalities used in heroin addiction treatment, highlighting their key principles and approaches:

Medication-assisted treatment (MAT): MAT is a widely recognized and evidence-based approach for treating heroin addiction. It involves the use of medications, such as methadone, buprenorphine, or naltrexone, in combination with counselling and behavioral therapies. These medications help to alleviate withdrawal symptoms, reduce cravings, and stabilize individuals in recovery. MAT has been shown to improve treatment retention, reduce illicit drug use, lower the risk of overdose, and improve overall outcomes [3]. **Behavioral therapies:** Various behavioral therapies are used to address the psychological aspects of heroin addiction. Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is commonly employed to help individuals identify and change negative thought patterns and behaviors related to drug use. Contingency Management (CM) uses positive reinforcement to motivate and reward individuals for staying drug-free. Motivational Interviewing (MI) helps individuals explore and resolve their ambivalence towards treatment and recovery [4].

Residential treatment programs: Residential treatment programs, also known as inpatient programs, provide a highly structured and supportive environment for individuals with severe heroin addiction. These programs offer round-the-clock care, including medical supervision, counselling, group therapy, and various activities to promote recovery. Residential treatment can be particularly beneficial for individuals with a long history of addiction, co-occurring mental health disorders, or those in need of a safe and drug-free environment to initiate their recovery journey [5].

Outpatient treatment: Outpatient treatment programs offer flexibility for individuals who do not require 24-hour supervision or have significant responsibilities in their daily lives. These programs involve scheduled counselling sessions, group therapy, and access to medical support. Outpatient treatment can vary in intensity, ranging from standard outpatient programs to intensive outpatient programs (IOP) that provide more frequent and structured treatment sessions [6].

Support groups and aftercare: Support groups, such as Narcotics

Anonymous (NA) and other 12-step programs, provide individuals in recovery with a supportive community of peers who understand their experiences. These groups offer on-going support, guidance, and a platform for sharing personal stories and strategies for maintaining sobriety. Aftercares services, including on-going counselling, relapse prevention planning, and access to community resources, play a crucial role in supporting individuals during their transition from treatment back to their daily lives [7].

It is important to note that the choice of treatment modality may vary based on individual needs, preferences, and the severity of addiction. Treatment plans are often tailored to address the unique circumstances and challenges faced by each individual [8].

Heroin addiction treatment is a long-term process that requires commitment, on-going support, and a comprehensive approach. With the right treatment and support system in place, individuals can break free from the grip of addiction, rebuild their lives, and achieve lasting recovery.

Advantages of Heroin Treatment

Heroin addiction treatment offers numerous advantages and benefits for individuals struggling with addiction. Here are some key advantages of heroin treatment:

Breaking the cycle of addiction: Heroin addiction can be an all-consuming and destructive cycle. Treatment provides an opportunity to break free from this cycle by addressing the physical and psychological dependence on the drug. It helps individuals overcome withdrawal symptoms, reduce cravings, and develop healthier coping mechanisms [9].

Medical support and safety: Heroin treatment programs often provide medical support and supervision, particularly during the detoxification phase. This ensures the safety and well-being of individuals as they go through the process of eliminating the drug from their system. Medical professionals can manage withdrawal symptoms, monitor vital signs, and provide appropriate medications to ease discomfort and promote a smoother transition into recovery [10].

Access to evidence-based therapies: Heroin addiction treatment incorporates evidence-based therapies, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), contingency management (CM), and motivational

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interviewing (MI). These therapies help individuals understand the underlying factors contributing to their addiction, develop coping strategies, and address co-occurring mental health issues. Evidence-based therapies have been shown to be effective in reducing drug use, improving mental health outcomes, and promoting long-term recovery [11].

Reduction of health risks: Heroin use is associated with numerous health risks, including the transmission of blood borne infections (such as HIV and hepatitis), overdose, and other physical and mental health complications. Treatment offers an opportunity to reduce these risks by promoting abstinence from heroin and providing education on harm reduction strategies. Medication-assisted treatment (MAT) can also help reduce the risk of overdose and associated fatalities [12].

Supportive environment: Heroin addiction treatment programs often provide a supportive and structured environment for individuals in recovery. They offer a community of peers who understand the challenges of addiction and provide support, encouragement, and accountability. Being in a supportive environment can help individuals feel understood, connected, and motivated to make positive changes [13].

Holistic approach: Heroin treatment programs typically take a holistic approach, addressing not only the addiction but also the individual's overall well-being. This may include addressing co-occurring mental health disorders, providing access to medical care, promoting healthy lifestyle changes (such as exercise and nutrition), and offering counselling and support for family members [14].

Relapse prevention: Treatment programs equip individuals with the tools and strategies to prevent relapse and maintain long-term recovery. They provide education on triggers and high-risk situations, teach coping skills, and assist in developing relapse prevention plans. On-going support, such as aftercare services and participation in support groups, further reinforce relapse prevention efforts.

Improved quality of life: Ultimately, heroin addiction treatment can significantly improve an individual's quality of life. It can restore physical health, repair relationships, enhance emotional well-being, and open doors to new opportunities. Treatment helps individuals regain control over their lives, rebuild a sense of self-worth, and rediscover purpose and meaning.

Disadvantages of Heroin Treatment

While heroin addiction treatment offers numerous benefits, it is important to acknowledge that there can be some potential disadvantages or challenges associated with the process. Here are a few:

Treatment cost: The cost of heroin addiction treatment can be a significant barrier for many individuals. Depending on the type of treatment program, it can involve expenses related to medical services, counseling sessions, medications, and residential or outpatient program fees. Access to affordable treatment options and insurance coverage can mitigate this challenge, but financial constraints may limit some individuals' ability to pursue comprehensive treatment.

Stigma and social challenges: Despite efforts to reduce stigma around addiction, there can still be societal judgment and discrimination towards individuals seeking treatment for heroin addiction. The fear of being stigmatized or facing social repercussions can deter some individuals from seeking help or openly discussing their treatment journey. Overcoming the stigma associated with addiction and seeking support from understanding and compassionate individuals is crucial

for successful treatment and recovery.

Treatment duration and commitment: Heroin addiction treatment is often a long-term and on-going process. It requires commitment, patience, and persistence to achieve lasting recovery. The duration of treatment can vary depending on individual needs, but it generally extends beyond the initial detoxification phase. Some individuals may find it challenging to sustain their motivation and engagement in treatment over an extended period.

Withdrawal and discomfort: Detoxification, the initial phase of heroin addiction treatment, can be physically and emotionally challenging. Withdrawal symptoms, including nausea, muscle aches, anxiety, and cravings, can be intense and uncomfortable. While medical supervision and support can help alleviate these symptoms, the process can still be difficult for some individuals.

Relapse risk: Heroin addiction is a chronic condition, and relapse is a possible challenge even after completing treatment. Factors such as triggers, environmental cues, and underlying mental health issues can contribute to relapse. Relapse should be viewed as an opportunity to reassess and modify the treatment plan, rather than a sign of failure. Ongoing support and access to relapse prevention strategies are crucial to minimize the risk of relapse.

Availability and access to treatment: Access to quality heroin addiction treatment programs may be limited in certain geographic areas, especially in rural or underserved communities. The lack of available treatment options can pose a significant barrier for individuals seeking help. Distance, transportation issues, and long waiting lists for treatment services can further impede timely access to care.

Co-occurring mental health disorders: Many individuals with heroin addiction have co-occurring mental health disorders, such as depression, anxiety, or trauma-related disorders. Addressing both addiction and mental health issues concurrently is crucial for successful treatment outcomes. However, identifying and treating co-occurring disorders may require specialized care and integrated treatment approaches.

Precautions to be Taken While Heroin Treatment

During heroin addiction treatment, it is important to take certain precautions to ensure safety, maximize treatment effectiveness, and support the individual's overall well-being. Here are some precautions to consider:

Medical Supervision: Seek treatment under the guidance and supervision of qualified healthcare professionals. Medical supervision is particularly important during the detoxification phase to manage withdrawal symptoms and ensure the individual's safety. Healthcare professionals can monitor vital signs, provide appropriate medications, and offer support throughout the treatment process.

Medication adherence: If medication-assisted treatment (MAT) is prescribed, it is crucial to strictly adhere to the prescribed medication regimen. Follow the instructions provided by the healthcare professionals, including dosage, frequency, and any additional guidelines. Do not alter or discontinue medication without consulting a healthcare professional.

Open communication: Maintain open and honest communication with the healthcare professionals involved in the treatment process. Discuss any concerns, questions, or difficulties experienced during treatment. Transparency allows for appropriate adjustments to the treatment plan and ensures the individual's needs are addressed.

Avoid triggers and high-risk situations: Identify and avoid triggers or high-risk situations that may lead to relapse. This may include staying away from environments, people, or activities associated with drug use. Develop strategies to cope with cravings and manage stress effectively. Engage in healthy activities and hobbies that promote a drug-free lifestyle.

Follow counselling and Therapy Recommendations: Engage actively in counselling and therapy sessions as recommended by the treatment professionals. Participate in individual counselling, group therapy, and any other therapeutic modalities included in the treatment plan. Be open and willing to explore underlying issues contributing to addiction and develop coping skills for long-term recovery.

Support network: Build a strong support network of family, friends, or peers who are understanding and supportive of the recovery journey. Seek their encouragement, guidance, and accountability. Consider involving loved ones in therapy or support group sessions to improve understanding and strengthen relationships.

Self-care: Prioritize self-care during the treatment process. This includes maintaining a healthy lifestyle with regular exercise, proper nutrition, and sufficient sleep. Engage in activities that promote relaxation, stress reduction, and overall well-being, such as mindfulness exercises, hobbies, or creative outlets.

Follow aftercare recommendations: After completing the initial phase of treatment, follow the recommended aftercare plan. This may involve attending support group meetings, continuing individual counselling, participating in relapse prevention programs, and accessing community resources. Aftercare is vital for maintaining long-term recovery and preventing relapse.

Monitor mental health: Pay attention to any changes or concerns regarding mental health during treatment. If experiencing symptoms of depression, anxiety, or other mental health issues, communicate this to the treatment professionals. Dual diagnosis treatment may be necessary to address both addiction and mental health disorders simultaneously.

Continued engagement: Recognize that heroin addiction treatment is a long-term process. Stay engaged in on-going support, therapy, and maintenance activities even after completing formal treatment. Continued participation in support groups and staying connected to

the recovery community can help sustain long-term recovery.

Taking these precautions can help individuals navigate the treatment process safely, optimize their chances of successful recovery, and minimize the risk of relapse. Remember, each person's journey is unique, and it is important to work closely with healthcare professionals to tailor precautions and treatment strategies to individual needs.

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